

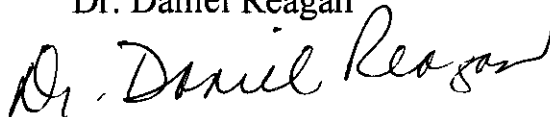
Media Bias in Time of Conflict: A Preliminary Investigation

An Honors Thesis (POLS 404)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Daniel Reagan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "R".

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Abstract

This study explores partisan (conservative or liberal) bias in three major newspapers: *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. My analysis occurs during times of conflict between the United States and Iraq in 1990-1991 and 2003-2004. Because there are so many recent books regarding media bias, this was an important study to complete. This examination is significant because the study finds that the papers overall have little to no bias on most dates regarding the war.

Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were unhappy with the circulation of their newspapers in the 1890's. Therefore, as a solution to sell more papers, they decided to exaggerate, especially about acts of violence in Spain. The result? Yellow journalism, a form of journalism that does not tell the truth but instead exaggerates so people will purchase more newspapers, became rampant, and the Spanish-American war came faster than expected. Fast forward 110 years to 2004. There are numerous books on bestseller shelves claiming that the media still does not treat stories fairly, from Eric Alterman's *What Liberal Media?* saying that the media is conservative to Ann Coulter's *Treason and Slander*, but these books, and most others claiming a media bias, have a partisan bias. This paper will examine the claims that these books make and will examine bias in three of the United States' most highly circulated newspapers: *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. Because these papers have wide circulations throughout the nation and world and are picked up in databases such as Lexis Nexis, they are quite influential on people's views of national and world conflicts. Also, wire services, such as the Associated Press often pick up stories from these papers, making them even more widely read and influential. Therefore, a bias in any of these papers could cause major changes in people's voting habits and ideas about the world and could therefore cause major changes in the United States. These papers will be examined on numerous dates from 1990-1991 and 2003-2004 regarding United States involvement in Iraq under the first and second Bush administrations.

Dates Chosen

These newspapers will be examined from September 12, 1990 to March 9, 2004 regarding national defense policy. Eight specific dates during the years 1990-1991 and 2003-2004 have been chosen. Each article will be compared to the other articles of the same day, since it is extraordinarily difficult to examine bias, and examining different topics would make the discussion even harder. All articles deal with the United States policy toward Iraq, especially during wartime. The dates chosen are not just random but are chosen because a major news event took place that day or the day before. The first date examined will be September 12, 1990 because the day before President George H. W. Bush declared that the United States would work with the United Nations to end Iraqi aggression. Second, January 17, 1991 newspapers will be examined because on January 16, the Bush administration announced that the United States was headed into the Gulf War. The next date will be February 28, 1991 because the war ended the day before. The fourth date will be March 20, 2003 because President George W. Bush announced on March 19, 2003 that the United States would be headed to war with Iraq. The articles from this date will emphasize his speech. The next date will be May 2, 2003 because the end of the war was declared on May 1. The final date will be November 3, 2003 because November 2nd was, up to that point, the bloodiest day for United States troops in Iraq since the war had been declared officially over. December 15, 2003 is the next date because it is immediately after the United States captured the leader of Iraq at the time, Saddam Hussein. The final date is March 9 and 10, 2004 because it is immediately after the signing of the Iraqi constitution. On March 9, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* had numerous articles about the signing of the constitution; however,

USA Today had no articles concerning the constitution until March 10. March 10 is used only for *USA Today*, whereas articles from March 9 are used for the other two papers.

Definition of Bias

Though there is now a clear understanding of what dates will be examined, bias must be defined before the application and conclusion process can begin. The definition used in this paper will be similar to the definition used by Dave D'Alessio and Mike Allen in their article "Media Bias in Presidential Elections: A Meta-Analysis" in the Autumn 2000 *Journal of Communication*. Their definition of bias explains, "It must be volitional, or willful; it must be influential, or else it is irrelevant; it must be threatening to widely held conventions, lest it be dismissed as mere 'crackpotism'; and it must be sustained rather than an isolated incident" (D'Alessio, Allen, 133). In this case, if the paper did not go to great lengths to try to avoid bias and bias is present, it will be labeled as bias. Though this may seem harsher than the definition just given, the reason is that all three papers claim that they use objective journalism in their articles and because people who read newspapers expect and deserve unbiased facts so they can make important decisions regarding political officials and current events. Bias in the papers will be evaluated based specifically on selection of quotations and how well they reflect the attitude of the country at the time, selection of information reported and omitted, and analysis of the quotations and factual information presented. Clear bias in any of these areas will be noted in the paper and will be discussed when giving the article a liberal or conservative label. Because Republican administrations were in office during the time of each of these dates, the article will be labeled as liberal if it seems to disagree with the

administration, and it will be labeled as conservative if the article seems to align with the views of the administration.

Choice of Articles

For each date chosen, I looked in the Lexis-Nexis news database for articles. The specific search terms for each date are as follows:

September 12, 1990 - Iraq

January 17, 1991 - Iraq

February 28, 1991 - Iraq

March 20, 2003 – Iraq, address, nation

May 2, 2003 - Iraq

November 3, 2003 - Iraq

December 15, 2003 – Saddam

March 9, 10, 2004 - constitution, Iraq

Each search term was searched in the “Headline, Lead Paragraph(s), Terms” category.

After choosing these search terms under each individual newspaper (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*), I sorted the articles by using the

"Relevance" feature on Lexis-Nexis. This feature is fairly accurate in sorting the articles by which articles are most helpful. Then, I looked at the top ten articles from each list.

After looking at them, I sorted by relevance on my own and chose the one that was most relevant to the topic chosen for the particular day. I examined exactly 189 articles and chose 24, or three for each date decided to examine and analyze for bias. (For some

dates, there were fewer than ten articles in any particular paper, and for these dates, ten articles were clearly not examined.)

Research Questions

D'Alessio and Allen state that in their findings that they were looking for answers to the questions, "Is there systematic partisan media bias in presidential campaigns? What is its magnitude and valence? Is one party covered more extensively than the other, or are the media more negative in tone about one party than the other? Does bias vary from campaign to campaign or medium to medium" (D'Alessio, Allen, 133)? They were looking also for a partisan bias. Similar questions will be posed for this paper, but because it does not examine Presidential elections, the questions must be changed slightly. Therefore, the questions considered are, "Is there a systematic partisan media bias in coverage on Iraq from September, 12 1990 to March 9, 2004? What is its magnitude and valence? (Essentially, this is asking the extent and position of the bias. For instance, it explains if part of the article biased and how biased the article is.) Are the media more negative in tone about one party than the other? Does bias vary depending on current action in Iraq?" By answering these questions for all three sources on each date and by looking at the difference among the papers, it is easier to come to a conclusion about the bias in a particular article.

September 12, 1990

Most Americans paid no attention to Iraq until it received press attention in August 1990 for invading its neighboring country, Kuwait. More emphasis was added on

September 11, 1990 when President George H. W. Bush made a speech to a joint session of Congress pointing out that the United States and United Nations “will not let this aggression stand” (Bush, 9/12/90). Also in this speech, he stated that the United States must look immediately at the budget deficit because a strong economy is necessary to lead the world against Iraq. On this date, the article in *The Washington Post* emphasized the budget portion of the speech far more than *The New York Times* or *USA Today*. *The Washington Post* explains, “The president, in his third address to Congress in 20 months, got a warm reception and a strong bipartisan support for his gulf policy, but some Democrats were critical of his budget pitch.” (DeVroy, 1A) *The New York Times*, on the other hand, focused on a positive Democratic response to the speech saying, “Mr. Gephardt called opposition to Iraq ‘a cause worth standing and fighting for’” (Rosenthal, 1A). *USA Today* explains the Democratic response by noting that there was “little partisan rhetoric” and mentioned Gephardt's line, “Tonight, in this crisis, we are not Republicans or Democrats. We are only and proudly Americans” (Benedetto, 1A). The only time *The New York Times* mentioned the budget was when it explained, “But the loudest applause, and the few cheers that echoed in the chamber, were reserved for Mr. Bush’s comments on the Federal budget deficit, particularly his call for a cut in the capital gains tax rate” (Rosenthal, 1A). When examining the three articles, they seem to indicate entirely different things; whereas all three are actually accurate, the article from *The Washington Post* is slightly misleading when it judges solely by the spoken Democratic response, and the article from *The New York Times* also falters when it judges solely by applause. *USA Today* judges bipartisan support for the war only by the Democratic response and lists ways that President Bush was trying to sell his economic

package to the Democrats. House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt, said in the Democratic response to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's actions, "The tyrant who rampaged into Kuwait has also murdered his own citizens with poison gas, plotted to acquire nuclear weapons, waged genocide against a minority people and now taken hostage thousands of men, women and children" (Grimes and Lambrecht, 15A). In this regard, all three articles are correct. Gephardt's response did criticize Hussein by saying he is a tyrant. However, the budget is where no paper was completely clear. *The New York Times* gave the impression that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party had the same ideas about how to fix budget difficulties. *The Washington Post*, on the other hand, indicated through their extensive talk on the budget that the parties agreed on no terms. *USA Today* implied that there was full bipartisan support for the war but did not indicate if that support extended to the economy. For the economy, *USA Today* only noted that President Bush was urging Congress to pass the budget and other economic changes. Gephardt continues in the Democratic response to explain, "The working people who got almost nothing from the tax cuts of the past must not be asked to pay most of the tax increases of today. Just as we ask wealthy nations to pay their fair share to deter aggression, so we must ask wealthy Americans to pay their fair share to prevent recession and reduce our debts" (Grimes and Lambrecht, 15A). When comparing this to Bush's speech, where he noted, "To my friends in Congress, together we must act this very month -- before the next fiscal year begins on October 1st -- to get America's economic house in order," (Bush, 9/12/90), and continuing on to say that it is necessary for all parts of the budget to be changed, it is clear that *The New York Times* is inaccurate. Whereas Bush may have received the biggest applause for his note about the capital gains

tax rate, the Democrats do not seem to share in his enthusiasm for cutting this tax.

However, *The Washington Post* also falters because, where they seem to find a complete difference between the attitude of the Democrats and Republicans on the subject of the budget, Gephardt and Bush both note in their speeches that they want a decreased dependency on foreign oil and a decreased amount of military spending. *USA Today* is slightly unclear in its explanation of whether or not there is strong bipartisan support for the economic situation in the country. In this example, *The New York Times* seems to have a slight conservative bias, as it skews the information about the capital gains tax. Aside from listening to applause, some excerpts from the Democratic spoken response would have helped their article have a more balanced view. On the contrary, *The Washington Post* has a slight liberal bias in this instance because it tended to leave out the information about the agreement on decreased dependency on foreign oil and a smaller defense budget. *USA Today* seems to have no bias, but the article is slightly unclear regarding the economic attitudes of the nation.

January 17, 1991

After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and did not withdraw upon the command of the United Nations and the United States, invasion was almost certain. Though air power was used beforehand, the formal announcement of the start of the war came on January 16, 1991. The article chosen for January 17, 1991 from *The New York Times* gives an account of the reaction to the start of the war in other parts of the world, with a special focus on Egypt. *The Washington Post*, on the other hand, gives more military tactical information, such as how the aircraft is doing, what allies are helping out the most, and

some political information such as comments from various Democratic Congressmen on what they think about the start of the war. Finally, *USA Today* gave an account about what was going on in the United States, giving numerous polls and quotations that reflected public opinion. *The New York Times* chose Egypt as their special focus because, at that time, many Kuwaiti exiles were staying in Egypt, and many Egyptians at that time were living in Iraq. The article expresses that the Egyptians, overall, seem to be excited about the start of the war, but they worry that it will have a “devastating” (Ibrahim, 18A) effect on their economy. The article also mentions Cuban and Japanese reaction to the war. It mentions that Cuban President Fidel Castro was completely opposed to the outbreak of war, and Japan wants to provide aid for the war but not be directly involved in combat. *The Washington Post*, on the other hand, explains that the first American casualty happened in the combat. Then Defense Secretary Richard Cheney stated to the *Post*, “there have been casualties and there will be more” (Atkinson and Broder, 1A). The article explains that the allied forces had been bombing consistently since the start of combat, but very few opposition forces seemed to be retaliating. The article also continues on to explain that Bush and Hussein had a small ‘argument’ the morning of the article, where an unidentified voice, believed to be Hussein’s, criticized Bush, saying that the White House had, “satanic intentions” (Atkinson and Broder, 1A). Aside from getting quotations from the President, his Defense Secretary, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, and Hussein, the *Post* also asked three Democratic Congressmen what they thought about the war. The two Senators (Sam Nunn from Georgia and David Boren from Oklahoma) agreed that the war was a good idea whereas Representative Ronald Dellums of California did not agree with

the war. The article also gave a timetable of three or four weeks for the air war before ground forces attacked and gave other logistics information regarding the war. *USA Today* took a completely different route in its article when it noted that support for the President was higher than it had been. The article interviews numerous individuals who either strongly oppose or strongly support the war. Aside from giving these quotations, the article lists numerous polls about public opinion concerning the war. The polls include: asking whether individuals support the war, if the war made them prouder to live in the United States, how long they expected the war to last, how they expected the view of the United States by other countries to change, and numerous other questions. The article also mentioned that President Bush had been consistently maintaining an approval rating of 60% concerning his actions in Iraq. Most poll numbers support the administration. These articles, unlike in the September 12, 1990 comparison, are too different to compare directly to each other. Though they all talk about the start of the war, the three all focus on different parts of the war. Therefore, a different kind of comparison must be used. In this instance, all three both articles have broad overviews. *The New York Times* has an overview of what kind of impacts the war is having worldwide; *The Washington Post* has a very broad overview of the first hours of military action and reactions, especially domestic reactions; and *USA Today* has a broad overview of support and opposition at home. Because all papers list almost only facts and very little analysis, none of the papers seem to be biased either liberally or conservatively. *The New York Times* found countries that were for the war entirely (Egypt), completely against the war (Cuba), and almost neutral (Japan). Additionally, *The Washington Post* found people domestically that were both for and against the war. Though *The*

Washington Post seems to have a more conservative bias because of the numerous people they found that were for the war, they interviewed individuals who are very close to the President, as well as those who frequently contest the policies of the President. Since all of these people who have differing politics are 'for' the war, the *Post* does not have a conservative bias. Additionally, since they reported things that would seem to be 'against' the war, such as the first casualty, they are demonstrating fair reporting. *USA Today* seems to have a very small liberal bias when they interview as many for as against the war when they explain that the ratio is not even close to half and half. However, because one of the 'opposing' quotations seems hopeful, and putting that quotation in the 'supporting' category makes the ratio about the same as it is in the poll, and because they were possibly just trying to help people in understanding all points of view, there is not a bias. Because this day is right after war was declared, all three papers have almost entirely facts and very little analysis, thus making it difficult for any paper to be biased in this circumstance. No paper, therefore, had an article that was even slightly biased for this date.

February 28, 1991

This Iraq war under President George H. W. Bush was extremely short, shorter than most analysts predicted. The most relevant article from *The Washington Post* on February 28, 1991 explains exactly that. This article lists numerous predictions that people had about the war when it began and then gives a paragraph or two for each prediction to explain why the prediction was wrong. *The New York Times* of the same date, however, focuses more on when and why the war ended. *USA Today* takes yet

another route and explains the numerous military tactics that were used during the war and how the United States was led to win the war. *The Washington Post* article lists about ten predictions, some labeled very clearly and others not labeled as clearly, of what was supposedly going to happen in Iraq. It then gives explanations for why each one did, or in more cases, did not, come true. Refuted predictions include, "Terrorism would be rampant," and "The Center for Defense Information, an anti-war Pentagon watchdog group, predicted that 10,000 Americans would be killed and 35,000 wounded in an overland drive all the way to Baghdad" (Achenbach, 1D). Each of the predictions involved the United States receiving more damage than it did during the course of the war. *The Washington Post* article refuted most of the predictions by using quotations from individuals who made the predictions or were in some way involved in the predictions. The sources range from Bonnie Garvin, a prominent anti-war activist of the time, who criticized President Bush, to Captain Jim Bush from the Center for Disease Information who openly praised President Bush because, "His timing was exactly right at every stage of the game" (Achenbach, 1D). Because *The Washington Post* got sources for every prediction they refuted and because they talked to both those who agree with the President and those who disagree, their bias is not wide, if it exists at all. The only sentence in the entire article that may be biased is the last sentence. "For the moment there is victory in the air, but this is not the end of the story. Wars belong to history; wars are forever" (Achenbach, 1D). This sentence gives the impression that the war was not as successful as the administration is indicating at the time. This sentence has a slight liberal bias because those who were more liberal at the time were more likely to question the war, which is exactly what this sentence does. This story in *The Washington Post*,

however, was supplemented with a story that explained that public opinion about the war was very high, a story that helped to give the 'other side' of the argument. *The New York Times* from this date also has no obvious bias in it. The *Times*, in this article, only talks to the President, high-ranking administration members, Pentagon officials, United Nations diplomats, and two members of Congress. Aside from the two members of Congress and the U. N. diplomats (the Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader of the time), every source is Republican. Because of the numerous Republican sources, one might claim that the article has a conservative slant. However, the article speaks with mostly Republicans because the President and members high in the administration would have more information on the end of the war than any Democrat would. It is simply through trying to find out as many facts as possible that the *Times* spoke with so many Republicans. The paper was not trying to show partisan bias through these quotations. Finally, *USA Today* for this date focuses on how the United States won the war. It explains different tactics that were used within the war, such as when certain troops were moved and why they were moved. It also gives labels to some of the different movements that were made during the war. Though this is simply factual, the article begins with the statement, "The first rule of magic is that a magician never reveals his secrets" (Howlett, 6A) and then continues to note that General Norman Schwarzkopf is a part time magician and insinuates that he worked magic in Iraq. *USA Today* gives the impression that the war was supposed to last much longer than it did, but because Schwarzkopf was in charge and had brilliant ideas, the war was much shorter. This idea that Schwarzkopf is brilliant is obvious when they scatter phrases such as, "The battle plan, which apparently went off without a hitch..." (Howlett, 6A). Because of this

insinuation that the troops and what was done in Iraq was magic, and because all of the quotations in the article indicate that the soldiers were very brave and the decisions made in conflict were correct, *USA Today* is biased for the administration and the policies they enacted, and is therefore leaning in a conservative slant for this day. Essentially, for February 28, 1991, *The Washington Post* has a very slight liberal bias; *The New York Times* has no measurable bias; and *USA Today* has a conservative bias.

March 20, 2003

On March 17, 2003, it became abundantly clear to the individuals within the United States and throughout the world that Iraq would have to change its policies and leaders immediately or risk invasion by the United States. On this date, President George W. Bush gave an ultimatum to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, which explained that if he and his top government officials did not leave Iraq within the next 48 hours, the United States was going to invade. Again, on March 19, 2003, President Bush addressed the nation, this time to announce that the 48 hours was up and war was starting between Iraq and the United States. On March 20, 2003, therefore, many newspapers, including the *Times*, the *Post*, and *USA Today* dissected his speech, reviewing and critiquing the speech and the decision to go to war in the March 20, 2003 paper. The *New York Times* pulled many different phrases from the President's speech and expanded on them so that the United States citizens would understand the speech better. For instance, the article defines, "the first prisoners" by noting, "It was just a trickle, but even before the invasion began, a group of 17 Iraqi soldiers gave themselves up to American troops, becoming the first prisoners of war" (DePalma, 15A). The article continues on to define such terms as

"the hours before" where it addresses the few hours leading up to the war and "money for home defense," where it talks about money that the White House requested from Congress. *The Washington Post* also dissected the speech but ran their column in the form of questions. It asks, "Why did we go to war?, How will the war go?, What could go wrong?, How is this war different from the first war with Iraq?," and "What might happen once the fighting stops" ("U. S. Begins War", 13C)? *USA Today* does not dissect the speech as much as the other two papers, but it does use some excerpts from the speech to better explain the war to its readers. The primary emphasis of the article was that attacks had begun, why they had begun, and what the implications were of these attacks. The article focuses quite a bit on what tactical maneuvers the military is using at the start of the war, but the more political emphasis begins when it discusses the Presidential address and the reaction of other countries. For instance, the article begins by quoting President Bush's address. "Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force." Though the selection of this quotation could make it seem like *USA Today* is biased toward the administration, the Presidential address from the 19th is littered with similar quotations, and the article later quotes a German official to prove that countries such as Germany disagreed with President Bush's assertion and believed that there were still opportunities to compromise and work diplomatically with Iraq. The article also mentions that the United States, in this instance, is setting a new precedent. "The war against Iraq is the first time the United States has launched a full-scale attack without the enemy having struck first" (Keen, Soriano, 1A). Because *USA Today* basically just lists quotations of President Bush's address and the opinion of other countries with little or no analysis, there seems to be

very little bias. However, because there are numerous quotations (such as those from German officials) to defy what President Bush noted the day before, and because they point out that this is a new precedent of pre-emptive warfare, which many people see as negative, there is a slight liberal bias in this article. *The New York Times* takes another approach to its article on this day. It provides little analysis about the speech. It simply defines some terms in the speech that the majority of the American public may not have known. Because of this, *The New York Times* has little to no bias. The only bias that could be found is in the last section, entitled, "The Wait and the Worry" (DePalma, 15A). This section only notes, "Some American troops, stuck for weeks in the heat and boredom of the desert, showed signs of anxiety as the moment of battle neared. Some reached for rosary beads and some touched mementos of home" (DePalma, 15A). This may be slight liberal bias since one cannot know if the troops are worried, but you can reasonably assume that troops risking their lives would be at least a little worried. Also, even President Bush noted in his address, "I know that the families of our military are praying that all those who serve will return safely and soon. Millions of Americans are praying with you for the safety of your loved ones and for the protection of the innocent" (Bush, 3/19/03). Through this quotation, it is clear that the feeling of fear is not a liberal bias since Bush addressed this feeling in his speech. *The Washington Post* has many more opportunities for bias in their article, especially when they answer questions such as "How is this war different from the first war with Iraq?" When answering this question, the *Post* explains that there is widespread opposition both domestically and internationally to this war, whereas in the first Iraq war (under President George H. W. Bush), there was more support from the United Nations and the citizens of the United

States. This response and similar responses are, according to some, liberal-leaning. However, this response is completely accurate. There was United Nations support for the United States in the first Iraq war, and there was not United Nations support in this war. Additionally, though the article explains that there is less support for this war than there was for the first war domestically, this is true. Therefore, though some may see this as biased, it is the truth. Numerous other statements from the *Post* could be construed as biased, such as, "... war is dangerous and confusing and things can go wrong" or "American soldiers might get killed" ("U. S. Begins War", 13C). However, these statements were also uncertainties at this point and are factual, not biased in any direction. Also, President Bush backed up these statements in his address when he noted, "A campaign on the harsh terrain of a nation as large as California could be longer and more difficult than some predict" (Bush, 3/19/03). Since President Bush agrees with the statements in this article, it is clearly not liberally biased. Therefore, for this date, neither the *Post* nor the *Times* have a biased article, and the article from *USA Today* has only a slight liberal bias.

May 2, 2003

At the end of the 'second' Iraq war, the United States did not descend into celebration as one might expect at the end of a war. Instead, President Bush came forward with a speech that explained this war is only the first victory in the long road for a war against terrorism and that some American troops would remain in Iraq, perhaps for a long time. *The New York Times* used many excerpts from this speech to tell the American people that the war was over. It was the focus of their article, but commentary

was spread throughout. *The Washington Post* also focused on President Bush's speech and added lots of commentary. *USA Today* had less commentary, but it still had a small amount. Because of all the commentary in the *Times* and the *Post*, those two papers had far more of a chance to have a slant than they do in articles with little commentary. The *Times*, it seemed had a FAR more liberal slant this time than they did on March 20, likely again because of the commentary. For instance, it said of one photo taken of the President while he was giving a speech, "The image of the president surrounded by beaming sailors was an image that White House officials clearly intend to use in the 2004 presidential campaign" (Sanger, 1A). While this may be true, the *Times* also tended to express worry that the President was making the wrong choices. Whereas in most of the previous articles, the *Times* simply reported the facts, in this article, the *Times* questioned many of the President's policies, such as continuing to look for weapons of mass destruction within the Iraqi borders and whether Saddam Hussein is alive or dead. The *Times* also questioned the use of force when it noted, "He both restated and amplified the 'Bush doctrine,' the aggressive commitment his administration has made to confront major threats before they reach American shores" (Sanger, 1A). By using words such as aggressive to describe the President, it portrays him in a negative light. The *Post*, on the other hand, emphasized the 'next step' on the 'war on terror' more than they emphasized problems with Iraq and the Bush policy. Whereas it did mention the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, it was not a focus as it was in the *Times* article. Because of this, war coverage itself was less biased; however, the *Post* did focus on the upcoming election even more than the *Times*, saying, of the same photo the *Times* referred to, "For a president fresh from victory in battle, who has cultivated an aggressive, can-do image,

it was a scene straight from "Top Gun" that is sure to appear in future campaign ads" (DeYoung, 1A). *USA Today* also focuses on how the war has ended, and that the President ended the war in a place that would give him a prime picture for the re-election campaign. In fact, at the end of the article, *USA Today* talks with the author of *Statecraft and Stagecraft*, Robert Schmuhl who noted, "'This was the kind of day that was planned with tomorrow's news coverage and campaign spots in mind'" (Benedetto, McQuillan, 1A). Also, *USA Today*, like the other articles, mentions that the administration did not find weapons of mass destruction during the war against Iraq. *USA Today*, however, cites the results of a poll where it explains that 79% of people polled still thought the war was justified even without finding weapons of mass destruction (Benedetto, McQuillan, 1A). All three articles are biased slightly liberally concerning weapons of mass destruction. As of that point in the conflict, Bush explained in his address, "We've begun the search for hidden chemical and biological weapons and already know of hundreds of sites that will be investigated" (Bush, 5-1-03). Though Bush notes that the investigation is not yet over, the articles all insinuate that the investigation was complete and had turned up unsuccessful at this point. The articles, especially the *Times*, also insinuate that the investigation was supposed to be finished before the war began. The *Washington Post* also mentions that the end of the war is not official, because, "Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, all prisoners of war must be released at the end of hostilities. U.S. forces are holding more than 6,000 Iraqi prisoners of war in a camp in southern Iraq" (DeYoung, 1A). The *New York Times* had a similar statement, and *USA Today* mentioned a separate law. Despite the fact that this is probably true, it demonstrates more of a liberal bias because instead of focusing on the more positive point of ending

the war, it focuses on the more negative point of not ending hostilities and not ending the war completely. *USA Today's* statement, however, is worded in such a way that makes it sound less liberal than the other two papers. Both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have a liberal bias in the articles from this date. However, the article from *The New York Times* seems bitterer about issues not being resolved, and it has a much stronger liberal slant than *The Washington Post* article. Though some of their comments seem biased either liberally or conservatively, *USA Today* has an even mix of conservative and liberal statements, therefore making the overall article unbiased.

November 3, 2003

One thing that angers Americans more than almost any other is the loss of the life of a fellow American. Therefore, November, 2, 2003, the bloodiest day in Iraq since the end of the war at that time, made many in the United States angry. *The Washington Post* of November 3, 2003 immediately uses sympathies to draw readers in with its first sentence beginning, "On the bloodiest day for the U.S. military in more than seven months" (Allen and Kessler, 1A). *The New York Times* of the same day starts with the same emphasis, as the second sentence of the article is, "It was the deadliest attack on American troops since the United States invaded Iraq in March" (Berenson, 1A). *The Washington Post* article continues to try to explain why there were so many casualties the day before. However, in its attempt to do so, it mostly points out divisions within the administration. For instance, it first gives quotations from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about the war, which Rumsfeld indicates the United States is still in, despite

the 'war' officially being declared over more than five months before this date. The article continues to explain,

On Oct. 9, L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator in Iraq, told a news conference in Baghdad that 60,000 Iraqis were providing security to their country. On Thursday, about three weeks later, Rice told foreign reporters the overall number was "over 85,000 and growing." That same day, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz told an audience at Georgetown University the figure was 'some 80,000 to 90,000' (Allen and Kessler, 1A).

Essentially, through trying to find the truth and find out why so many casualties happened on one day, *The Washington Post* pointed out problems within the White House. However, instead of talking primarily to President Bush and other top-ranking administration officials, *The Washington Post* also talked to many individuals running for the 2004 Democratic Presidential nomination. Since many of these candidates were staunchly anti-war to begin with, their comments either advance that sentiment and criticize the American domination of troops in Iraq or refuse to comment on the attacks of the previous day because they are so recent. *The Washington Post* talks with only a few administration officials who would have access to information surrounding the attacks. (These officials are Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, US administrator in Iraq Paul Bremer, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, two ranking members of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, and a 'White House spokesman.') The *Post* printed only one sentence from most of these individuals, and much of it was only small details. Because of the few people interviewed who would be privy to this information and the numerous people interviewed who would not be knowledgeable about the

previous day, *The Washington Post* article shows an obviously liberal bias in this instance. *The New York Times* begins its article with more of an emphasis on what exactly happened. This article gives more details about the helicopter crash that caused most of the deaths on the previous day. Whereas *The Washington Post* does give information about a helicopter crash, *The New York Times* gives more information, such as the specific geographic area of the explosion, the type of helicopter, and the time of the explosion. The article continues on to explain some more recent history of the combat, explaining, "In the last 10 days, at least 31 American soldiers have been killed, a toll whose full impact on the nation is not yet clear" (Berenson, 1A). This quotation does not have a bias. In fact, it tries very hard to be unbiased by explaining that the implications are not yet clear. This article continues on to use the same quotation about war from Rumsfeld that *The Washington Post* used, but it does not interview the same sources as the *Post* article. Instead, it interviews some high-ranking administration officials and some people in Iraq who were immediately affected by combat in the area. Finally, *USA Today* puts a lot of emphasis on what will happen. This article talks about how the approval of the Bush administration at the time is decreasing and also addresses what will happen with troops in Iraq. *USA Today* talks to numerous administration officials and members of Congress to find out what will happen. For instance, *USA Today* interviews Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar. Despite talking with many conservative individuals, *USA Today* seems to have a negative view on the administration and the decisions of the administration. For instance, there are three bullet points that note what the numerous attacks will do that do not seem to come from any source that

demonstrate negativity toward the administration. These bullet points are, "Intensify debate about the wisdom of Bush's course," "Increase pressure on Bush to change his policy," and "Obscure his agenda" (Keen, 6A). Though these points do seem logical, they are slightly liberal since they all are negative for the Bush administration, and some positive news was likely occurring for the administration at the time that is not addressed. Though *The Washington Post* has a liberal bias because it interviews so few individuals who are in the administration and many Democratic candidates for President, who are openly against the administration, *The New York Times* has a slight conservative bias for not interviewing anyone outside the Republican party. Whereas the administration are the 'experts' in this situation, it is important to get some feedback and understanding from the opposing side. Whereas the *Post* goes to great lengths in getting this information, the *Times* does not collect any information. However, *The New York Times* did get quotations from those individuals who live in Iraq, which the *Post* did not do. For this date, *The Washington Post* has an obvious liberal slant, and *The New York Times* has a slight conservative slant. Because *USA Today* seems to talk negatively about the administration and throws in statistics such as a lowering approval rating that are true, but still make the administration look bad, this paper, like the *Post*, has a liberal slant. Though *USA Today* had a variety of interviews to back up what they said, much of the liberal view was written by *USA Today*, not given through quotations. Therefore, their slant is definitely liberal for the day.

December 15, 2003

When someone 'evil' is captured, the entire world cheers. At least, that is the result the United States expected when Saddam Hussein was found and captured before the articles on this date were written. These articles are actually from the Monday after the Sunday morning that Hussein was captured. Therefore, there was almost a day between the capture and the writing of the articles on this date. The *Washington Post* reflects the viewpoint of numerous individuals in their article. The article is mostly littered with quotations from individuals in the United States. However, there is some writing, such as when the writer compares Saddam Hussein to a computer virus. The quotations range from a quotation from the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, William Kristol's, "I was really quite moved, somehow. It's hard to explain. It's so rare that justice is done in the world" to U. S. citizen Jackie McMakin who noted, "I hope it doesn't help Bush get reelected." Because the quotations range to include both the positive reactions about Hussein's capture and the very negative reactions, the bias is small, if existent. Since most of the quotations talk to people who are happy about the capture, a small bias could be implied to the conservative viewpoint. However, most United States citizens were happy at that time about the capture of Saddam Hussein, so individuals who were happy about the capture were probably more common. Therefore, the number of quotations they gathered to support each viewpoint reflected the point of view of the nation at the time. *The New York Times* ran a similar article on December 15, giving reactions of individuals to the capture of Hussein. Again, the answers they gathered range from Kirklan Tabor's, "In my eyes, he's absolute evil, and I'm glad he's been caught" to Charley Richardson who noted, "This removes the last excuse that the Bush administration has been using to continue the occupation." *The New York Times*, much

like the *Post*, had more comments from people who were glad that Saddam Hussein had been captured, rather than those who were upset. However, more people in the United States at the time really were happier that Saddam Hussein was caught than those who thought that it was a negative impact. *The New York Times*, though, has an even smaller percentage of people who feel negatively about Hussein's capture than those who feel happy about it. Finally, *USA Today* ran an article looking ahead to see what Hussein's capture means to the United States in the long run. This article lists a couple of quotations that express happiness for the capture of Saddam Hussein, including one quotation from the President. It also lists that 82% of people, according to a USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll view the capture as a positive thing. The article continues on to predict that capturing Saddam Hussein will help the Republican Party more than the Democratic Party. Looking back, it seems as though this could have been biased in a conservative manner since in the long term, the capture of Hussein did not make a dramatic difference for either the Republican or Democratic Party. However, at the time, it seemed like a reasonable assumption given that the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination was the anti-war Howard Dean.

Because both the *Times* and *Post* use a similar format and have a similar percentage of quotations of each viewpoint, it is clear that both the *Times* and the *Post* have the same type of bias. Though they both have more quotations from the side that supports the capture of Hussein, the ratio is similar to what one would have found in the nation on that day. Though the *Post* does have a larger percentage of people who were against the capture of Hussein, or at least against the consequences of the capture, it is likely just because of the 'random' people that they happened to ask versus the 'random'

people that the *Times* happened to ask. Therefore, neither paper has a bias on this particular day since they captured all viewpoints and captured them in a similar ratio to what one would have found in the United States on that day. Also, *USA Today* is unbiased on this day because though they make assumptions about how the capture will affect politics, the assumptions are reasonable given the political climate of the nation at that particular time.

March 9 & 10, 2004

One of the most significant steps toward giving Iraq independence from the United States occupation was having them agree on a constitution. With factions in the country that often have difficulties agreeing, any sort of step toward agreement becomes major news. Therefore, when, on March 8, Iraqi leaders signed a Constitution, it was addressed in all three of the papers. The article from *The New York Times* on March 9 delivers both positive and negative news in the first sentence of the article. It explains, "Iraq's leaders signed an interim constitution on Monday and agreed to embark on a common path toward democratic rule, but the celebratory mood was dampened by calls from the country's most powerful Shiite leaders to amend the new charter before it goes into force" (1A). Therefore, the first sentence celebrates that a constitution was signed, but it cautions that all of the obstacles have not yet been overcome. Later in the article, it notes that caution is even more important because of the size of the Shiite group within Iraq, and the leader of this group, Ayatollah Sistani notes that the constitution lacks legitimacy until an elected national assembly. The article also explains that the future of Iraq may be on shakier ground than United States officials predicted at the time. Despite

these cautions, the article continues on to note that the Kurds within Iraq are more hopeful because the constitution will provide them with equal rights that they desperately want. The article ends by noting that a United States official still predicts that the United States and other nations will meet the goal of turning control of Iraq over to Iraqi citizens by June 30, 2004.

The Washington Post gives similar reservations that the *New York Times* does. It explains the cautions that Ayatollah Sistani presented about the constitution and explains the reluctance of the Shiites to comply fully with the constitution. The *Post* also gives information about how the constitution gives confidence to the Kurds and gives quotations from people who drafted the constitution and how optimistic they are about the success of the constitution. The *Post*, instead of looking ahead to June 30, however, looks to specific provisions of the constitution that individual leaders are unhappy with, and it lists ways that some people have given to try and fix these individuals. At the end, it specifically focuses on how the Iraqi constitution differs from the United States constitution and Bill of Rights. For instance, the Iraqi constitution lists an official religion (Islam) that it should be modeled after, whereas the United States constitution emphasizes a separation between church and state.

Finally, *USA Today*, on March 10, seems to hold a negative view about the constitution from the very first sentence where it notes, "The signing of Iraq's temporary constitution Monday hardly looked like an auspicious start toward establishing a democracy" (1A). The negative view continues throughout the article when it presents quotations from Ayatollah Sistani that the Kurdish faction is getting the best deal from the constitution. Despite the obviously liberally biased beginning, the article changes and

has other non-liberal quotations throughout. For instance, the article presents no partisan bias when it explains that problems in Iraq are similar to those that the founding fathers of the United States had at the Constitutional Convention. Also, the article presents a bit of a conservative bias when the last sentence notes, "Iraqis were guaranteed freedom once before -- under a constitution ignored during Saddam Hussein's brutal rule. Today's struggle to create a system all can embrace lays the groundwork for an Iraqi constitution that truly becomes the law of the land" (1A). *USA Today*, like in many of its other articles, demonstrates both very conservative and very liberal bias in the same article. However, because it seems to demonstrate liberal bias and bias against the Constitution and the improving of Iraq through the Constitution more frequently than conservative bias, the article is biased in a liberal manner.

The *New York Times* article seems to be a bit liberal by the ideas that it presents. However, because it provides quotations to back up every single piece of information that it presents, it is not liberal but instead rides the line between being liberal and saying that the constitution is bad and being conservative and contending that the constitution is completely good. *The Washington Post* seems to give neither a liberal nor conservative bias, but some of the problems that they bring up toward the end seem to indicate that they have a slight ethnocentric bias, where it believes that the United States constitution is superior to the Iraq constitution. This leaves *USA Today* to be the only paper that presents a bias. For this time, *USA Today* does present a liberal bias.

Conclusions

In the eight articles presented for each paper, the *New York Times* has a slight conservative bias in two articles, a slight liberal bias in one article, a liberal bias in one article, and four unbiased articles. *The Washington Post*, on the other hand, has three slightly liberal articles, one liberal article, and four neither conservatively nor liberally biased articles. *USA Today* has two liberal articles, one slightly liberal article, one conservative article, and four unbiased articles. Because this paper is based on only eight articles from each of three papers that have large circulations and frequently have more than one article on a topic per day, the only thing that can be proven from this is that there is far less of a consistent bias in the media, or at least in these three papers, than you might think by reading about media bias on an almost daily basis. Because the three papers have no bias on at least half of the days, it is clear that the papers really do try to strive for equal journalism. Also, because there is only a slight bias on most of the other days, the papers are clearly not trying to create bias within their articles. *The New York Times* is slightly more conservative than *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*. However, it is likely that *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* may just challenge the current administration, and this is why they have more of a bias against the administration. Also, because the biases of the three papers are so close and are in the middle of the road, it is clear that these three papers do try to have fair journalism and accomplish this on the majority of days when they report on significant, country-changing events.

Limitations

Because this paper examines only eight articles from each the *Times*, the *Post*, and *USA Today*, it clearly ignores thousands of articles that were written on the same issue. Only one article was chosen from each paper from each day meaning that only a small amount of articles were examined to make the conclusions. Additionally, this paper only examines media bias in the time of conflict during the Republican administrations of George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush. Therefore, what is interpreted as a liberal bias may just be the paper challenging the administration, and if there was a Democratic administration in office, the article would perhaps have a completely different slant, because the papers may just have a habit of challenging the administration that holds the executive office. Furthermore, though this small cross-section of papers does not demonstrate a liberal or conservative bias in the media, it may just be demonstrative of these three papers not being very biased when major events occur to change the atmosphere of the country. Additionally, this paper does not examine trends in media bias if there are any. Because all of the articles are only taken from four separate years, the farthest two being 14 years apart, it is difficult to examine trends in media bias, and this gives us only a small cross-section. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a limitation of this paper is that truth is often used as a defense against claims of bias. Numerous times throughout the paper, I note that something cannot be biased because it is true. While researching, I evaluated how well stories represented each side of the arguments. When they only represented one side, they were not labeled as true. Instead, they were labeled as biased. Because of this, bias, in the future, may need a narrower definition to ensure that problems do not arise from looking at facts in a

story. A definition of truth would also be helpful, especially if the current definition of bias is used.

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